

The University of Chicago

FACTORS
IN THE MODERN SURVIVAL OF
MILLENNIALISM

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY
SCHOOL IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
AND ETHICS

1933

By
ROBERT WARD McEWEN

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CHAPTER IV
AN INTERPRETATION OF THE SURVIVAL OF MILLENNIALISM

(a)

Theological Factors

Millennialism is not a central point of tension in the field of modern theology. Unlike the early Christian church, the modern church is too closely affiliated with the ordinary concerns of living in this world to be greatly interested in the end of the present age. With the passing of the years, the hope of the early church, based on Jewish apocalypticism, that Jesus would return to set up a perfect earthly kingdom, was transmuted into a conviction that the church is in the world to build such a perfect order. Since the days of Augustine this latter conception has been dominant in the life and thought of the church.

Along with this majority position, however, millennialism has continued as a minority movement, finding expression in various sects of limited duration and occasionally gaining some attention in broader circles. Many prophets have arisen, proclaiming the imminent return of the Lord, and usually setting a date for the advent. But the uneventful passing of that date has not discouraged those who, in every generation, have found hope and comfort in the doctrine. In the last fifty years, especially, these ideas have been represented in American Protestantism by a non-denominational movement,¹ as well as by adventist sects. This movement has attracted some attention and following through the holding of so-called "prophetic conferences" devoted to the exposition of the doctrine, the influence of Biblical institutes where it is taught, and the wide-spread dissemination of books and pamphlets on the subject.

The word used by the proponents of this movement to describe it is "pre-millennialism." This term implies that the second advent of Christ is to precede the millennium of bliss on the earth. The center of interest, however, is not in the millennium, nor in the final judgment or the eternal state of bliss which is to follow, but in the advent of Christ, itself. The movement has retained the word "pre-millennialism" to distinguish it from another interpretation of the Biblical reference to the culmination

¹S.J. Case, The Millennial Hope, p. 204, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1918.

of human history, an interpretation which looks for the gradual achievement of such a state of earthly bliss as the millennium by ordinary social processes, to be culminated in the return of Christ for a final judgment. But this latter view, "post-millennialism," has never been a vital or important belief, and is now comparatively negligible in its influences. If Christ is not coming until after a thousand-year period of earthly blessedness, our natural concern is for the bringing in of this millennium, rather than in waiting for his coming.

In recent years, therefore, the issue has come to be that of millennialism versus non-millennialism, rather than pre-millennialism versus post-millennialism. Are we to wait until he returns, believing that only then can the millennium come, or are we to devote our efforts to the building of the perfect order, believing that as we do this Christ "comes" more and more into the lives of Christians and the life of the world? Since the term "adventism" has sectarian connotations, we use the term "millennialism" to denote the first of these alternatives.

Auguste Sabatier claims no originality for his distinction between "the religion of authority" and "the religion of the spirit." He ascribes it to the apostle Paul, who wrote, "The letter killeth, but the spirit maketh alive."¹ But Sabatier, as much as any modern writer, has called our attention to two basic approaches to Christian theology. He is pointing the way to the "religion of the spirit," -- not as a new religion, but as a re-emphasis on what seems to him to be the very essence of Christianity:

"The gospel in its very principle implied the abrogation of religions of authority, and inaugurated as a fact the religion of the Spirit. The religious relation which it instituted between God and man was not determined by the necessary mediation of a priest, nor by the obligatory letter of the law, but by the inner bond of love, by the consciousness of a filial relation between child and father. Thus the center of gravity of the religious life was changed from without to within, from the institution to the conscience."²

The theological expression of the "religion of the spirit" is concerned with the statement of the basic Christian convictions which have resulted from the experience of individuals and groups which have followed Christ. It distinguishes between these basic convictions and the literary, political or social form in which they have been clothed. Instead of turning to the theological

¹Auguste Sabatier, Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit, p. 281, New York: Geo. H. Doran Co., 1904, trans. Louise S. Houghton.

²Ibid., p. 284.

patterns of the third or the sixteenth century for its authority, therefore, this approach to theology examines those patterns in the light of the conditions in which they were produced, to discover the basic religious affirmations which they attempted to express. Its task is then to express its faith in the language of contemporary social forms and in the light of contemporary knowledge. This does not dissociate the modern Christian from his historical tradition, but rather enhances his understanding of his relationship to it. This approach to theology finds in the Bible a record of the religious discoveries and hopes and ideals of earlier generations, while it is free from any dependence on the words of that book for its ultimate authority. It finds in Jesus Christ the supreme expression and the primary source of its belief in a God who sustains and promotes the values of human personality, while it is free from any slavish adherence to a particular historical and dogmatic formulation of that faith. It recognizes the place of society in the determination of the forms of individual experience. Doctrine is regarded as the formulation of beliefs growing out of the collective behavior of the groups which build it. And this doctrine is regarded not primarily as a statement of the philosophical position of the group, but as the basis for group action.

Thus conceived, theology has implications for the program of the Christian church, implications which regard the church as possessing a real mission, a raison d'etre, in the modern world, and assumes that the church will share in the leadership of social movements consistent with its own spirit and goals.

Sabatier believed that the "religions of authority" were rapidly losing ground. He traced the development of the authority of the hierarchy and of tradition in the Roman Catholic church. He explained the substitution, in Protestantism, of the authority of an inerrant and infallible Bible, for these authorities. An examination of the religious world at the end of the nineteenth century convinced him that all of those authoritarian approaches to theology were slowly retreating from their entrenched dogmatic fortresses. The religion of the future, he concluded, would be a religion of the spirit. His analysis of the situation seems to us to be an over-simplification of the truth of the matter. The discoveries of the religion of the spirit are often used, as he pointed out, as the foundation stones of later religious authority, as was the case with the Bible in the Reformation. And while we share his optimistic conclusion that the future of religion lies in the kind of approach which he calls the religion of the spirit, the religions of authority will survive, and will probably continue with us for some time.

For these religions of authority represent attempts to conserve old values in what is believed to be permanent form. The social patterns which constitute the materials of these forms change slowly, but they survive in these theological expressions long after they have vanished in political and social life. This seemingly innate conservatism of religion bears testimony to man's desire for stability and permanence in the expression of his deepest convictions and experiences. In this field, a state of rest has a greater appeal than a state of equilibrium. For those who approach theology in this way, the form of the doctrine becomes of equal importance with the underlying religious conviction. An interpretation of that form in anything but a literal and authoritative sense seems impossible.

The theological "soundness" of a man or a book is determined by his adherence to an accepted system of doctrines. The very vocabulary is important, and a man may be condemned as a heretic if not an atheist, not for what he says, but for the absence of certain expected phrases in the way he says it. Conflict between these two approaches to theology would seem to be inevitable.

Within Protestantism this second approach to Christian theology finds its authority in a literal interpretation of the Bible. At least in theory, the book is equally inspired throughout, and every word of it is therefore eternally true. Beginning with the idea of the Bible as an infallible guidebook in religious living, this conception has expanded into an idea of the Bible as the final authority on every subject mentioned therein. For many people this has meant an almost complete separation from modern thought. Insisting that the Bible is to be carried over bodily into our modern religious thought, this loyalty to his religious tradition often prevents its possessor from understanding or appreciating either the knowledge of the present day or the religious people who express their faith in terms of that knowledge.¹

The implications of this approach to theology for the social attitudes of the person holding it are obvious. In so far as an individual separates himself from the thought forms of his own generation, he separates himself from its social ideals and therefore from its movements and programs.

It is very easy for such a theology to foster a religion of escape, offering future rewards and compensations for the loss of present adjustment. Man is seen to be a pilgrim and a wanderer on this earth. He should therefore keep himself as free as possible from relationships which would involve compromise with the

¹Shailer Mathews, The Gospel and the Modern Man, p. 68, New York: Macmillan and Company, 1910.

things of this world. Since it has departed from the program which he finds in his authority, be it tradition, creed, or the Bible, he sees little reason for confidence in its social processes.

Millennialism survives in our modern world as one phase of this approach to Christian theology. Its center of interest is in eschatology, but it brings to this subject the pre-suppositions of a religion of authority. The most important of these pre-suppositions is that of a legalistic, literal interpretation of the Bible. The necessity of this attitude toward the Bible as the basis for the doctrine is recognized by the millennialists themselves, and is clearly evidenced in the statements about the authority and inspiration of the Bible which appear in the manifestoes issued by the "prophetic conferences."¹ Since it is in Protestantism that the doctrine of the literal authority of the Bible has risen and flourished, it is naturally there that millennialism has its influence.

The movement finds a definite order of future events depicted in the Bible. The second advent is the next item on the divine program.² In the first of its two phases, the true Christians, among whom the millennialists are numbered, are to be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. This is called "the rapture." They will be missed by those remaining on earth, but life will go on, with the forces of evil now stronger than ever. At this point the Antichrist appears to rule over a reconstructed Roman empire.³ The second phase of the advent follows a few years after the first. It brings Christ to the earth, where he rules for a thousand years with the seat of government in Jerusalem. Then Satan, who has been bound during the millennium, is released, only to be finally vanquished. The final judgment follows this victory and the eternal state of individuals and nations is decided. The literature of the modern movement devotes considerable space to the elaboration of these future events, and to speculation concerning them.

But the millennialist, who is to be caught up in the first phase of the advent, is not personally concerned with these things, which do not alter his own status. It is the coming of Christ "for his saints," the parousia, which occupies his attention.

¹E.g., J.M. Gray and Others, The Coming and Kingdom of Christ, p. 239, Chicago, Bible Institute Colportage Assn., 1914.

²J.M. Gray, Prophecy and the Lord's Return, pp. 20-21, New York: Revell Publishing Co., 1917.

³Daniel's vision of the image, (Dan. ii) and the coming of the Antichrist portrayed in Revelation are thus fulfilled.

It will be soon and it may happen at any moment.

This schema of future events is clearly based on this attitude toward the Bible. The conviction that every word of the book is the Word of God carries with it the implication that every sentence which refers to the future must find literal fulfillment. The interpretation of scores of verses from the Old Testament as applying to the second advent of Christ is the result of this conviction. Some prophecies, the millennialist admits, have been partial or "typical" fulfillment, but the glorious completion of their fulfillment awaits the advent, while others, never having been fulfilled, even in type, apply entirely to the return of the Lord. The difficulties of securing a consistent interpretation of the Bible from this point of view are apparent in the curious complexities of the picture of the future. One who was composing such a prophecy de novo would hardly chain the devil for a thousand years, and then release him for another conflict whose issue was already determined. But it is a perfectly rational idea, apparently, to one who must harmonize conflicting authoritative statements concerning the devil's future.

The millennialist naturally calls to the support of his completed scheme as many proof-texts as possible. The twisting of the natural meaning of words, the lifting of verses out of their literary as well as social and historical context, which accompany this process, have been pointed out in George R. Berry's study of millennialist interpretation of the Old Testament.¹ Yet the strength of the authority of the letter is such that the millennialist is not dismayed if he finds only one such proof-text to support a particular item in his picture of the future.²

Another characteristic of the modern movement, the selection of the various events in current history and salient aspects of modern life as signs of the imminence of the advent, is equally dependent on a doctrine of the Bible that makes literally authoritative the vague and symbolic word-picture in which the Biblical writers depicted the coming of the "day of Jahweh" or the advent of the Messiah or the destruction of Jerusalem. The Old Testament prophecies of a coming day when Jerusalem should again be the capital of an independent Jewish nation.³ For example, are still

¹G.R. Berry, Premillennialism and Old Testament Prediction, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929.

²Only one reference, I Thessalonians 4:16-18, is ordinarily cited to support the idea of "the rapture."

³A.H. Burton and E.L. Langston, "The Restoration of the Jews," Advent Testimony Handbook, Vol. I.

unfulfilled. Their fulfilment is therefore to be expected in connection with the advent. The modern Zionist movement, the overthrow of Turkish dominion in Palestine accomplished in the world war, the promises of "the Balfour note" that Palestine should again be the home of the Jews assume real significance in persuading others of the imminence of the advent, and in strengthening the hopes of those who already accept this position.

Despite the unanimous conviction of the millennialists that we are in the last days of the age, there is a growing hesitancy to set dates for the advent. The prophecies of earlier millennialists who delved into the mystic numbers of Daniel and Revelation¹ have too often brought discredit on the whole movement, its leaders insist. But many writers cannot resist the temptation, and virtually every year is selected by one of them as the year of the advent.

Biblical authority is also found for the assertion that a sign of the last days will be the apostasy of many from the faith.² But this alone hardly accounts for the virulent attacks made by the millennialists on all who differ from them in matters of belief. The apostasy is the abandonment of the theological patterns of earlier generations, and the movement in recent years has allied itself definitely in opposition to religious "modernism."³

While the millennialist insists that his authority and his only authority is the Bible, and while there is little evidence to support the contention that the movement has in recent years developed a complete system of theology,⁴ there are other theological pre-suppositions, drawn from a particular traditional "religion of authority," implied in the millennialist position. Evangelism is necessary to complete the number of the elect. The system of dispensations in history, great epochs ending invariably in man's failure to rule himself and requiring divine intervention, is an expression of the conception of immutable decrees in an absolute divine will. A dualism that includes the personification of the devil is the explanation of the existence of evil. These ideas

¹E.G., H. Grattan Guinness, Approaching End of the Age, London: Morgan and Scott, 1878. His work is the basis of the calculations of most chronologists.

²A.C. Gaebelein, The Return of the Lord, pp. 101-102, New York: Our Hope Publishing Office, 1925.

³Ibid., p. 14.

⁴Cf. H.F. Rall, Modern Premillennialism and the Christian Hope, p. 104, New York: Abingdon Press, 1920.

link millennialism most closely with the Calvinist type of orthodoxy. One millennialist writer, after pointing out this affinity, expressed his wonder that those of other theological persuasions could become interested in millennialism.¹

But the center of interest of the movement is so definitely in the field of eschatology that these questions are seldom raised, and the modern millennialists have been as anxious to prove that John Wesley shared their position as they have to claim John Calvin.² The movement itself insists on the necessity of an external authority in religion. I.M. Haldeman³ and Christabel Pankhurst⁴ are two contemporary leaders who have expressed themselves very specifically at this point.

Since the world is essentially evil, the program of millennialism is to save as many as possible "out of the world." This conviction that the individual can be saved, but that society is hopeless, accounts not only for the attitude of separatism but also for the failure of the movement to organize as a group for united action. The movement is a movement of individuals, saved as individuals from an evil society. So long as they refrain from any organized attempt to influence society, those who compose the movement need make no compromise with the world. W.H. Griffith Thomas gives us an illustration of this attitude:

"We are said to be indifferent to the great movement for Church union which means co-operation. But we ask this: If you are to have Church union, what is the basis of it? Is it to be founded on truth? That is the only true basis of unity; and it is because we believe that a great many of those who are now in favor of Church union and federation do not hold the truth of the Bible that we say that we want unity, but never at the expense of truth."⁵

Such a tendency to separatism would seem to be implied in any such legalistic approach to theology as is represented by millennialism.

The social utopias of Plato, Sir Thomas More, Campanella, and Bellamy gave us pictures of an ideal society, a society in which our present social problems have found solution. These

¹I.S.H. Kellogg, "Premillennialism: Its Relation to Doctrine and Practice," in Bibliotheca Sacra, XLV, p. 253, 1888.

²John Wesley and Premillennialism, Cincinnati: God's Revivalist Office, 1884, by Nathanael West.

³I.M. Haldeman, Signs of the Times, pp. 121-122, 139, 7th ed. Philadelphia: Phila. School of the Bible, 1919.

⁴Christabel Pankhurst, Seeing the Future, pp. 150-151, New York: Harpers Bros., 1929.

⁵A.C. Gaebelain, Christ and Glory, p. 228, New York: Our Hope Pub. Office, 1813.

utopias have occupied an important place, not only in literature but also in social thought, expressing as they do man's eternal discontent with the world as it is. They were written by men who longed for a social order in which war, class conflict, poverty, and other social ills should have disappeared. But they were regarded in their own times as dream states, ideals beyond possibility of achievement.¹

The eschatologies of the Hebrew and Christian religions have included similar pictures of a golden age to come. But these eschatologies have made a significant contribution to utopian thought. They have insisted that these things shall be. God will bring his Day, will send his Messiah, to establish such a perfect order. The preaching of the Hebrew prophets, and to a greater extent the idea of the kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus, assume as well that man is to have a part in the building of the perfect order. Such ideas are lacking, however, in the doctrines of Jewish apocalypticism. Although they express the religious conviction that the perfect order is sure to come, they offer no program, but hope for the accomplishment of the new order through divine intervention. As J.O. Hertzler puts it, "they in no way assist in bridging the gulf between 'that which is' and 'that which ought to be.'"²

The modern mind has little interest other than the historical in the utopias of the past. "With the rise of a theory of history," Hertzler writes, "real utopias in the original sense have ceased to appear, for the necessity of superimposing a perfect society upon an imperfect one, has ceased to be." This change, he adds, "dates from the birth of Hegelianism and became definite later with the work of Marx, Spencer, and Darwin, along the lines of evolution."³ This new spirit, when it pictures the ideal society, finds expression in such works as those of H.G. Wells,⁴ which presuppose a future of development toward our ideals, implemented by the techniques of social processes and movements.

The approach to Christian theology which represents the "religion of the spirit" recognizes and accepts this change in

¹H.F. Russell Smith, Harrington and His "Oceana," p. 12, Cambridge: The University Press, 1914.

²J.O. Hertzler, History of Utopian Thought, p. 64, New York: MacMillan and Company, 1923.

³Ibid., p. 310.

⁴H.G. Wells, New Worlds for Old, New York: Macmillan Company, 1908; Men like Gods, New York: Macmillan Company, 1923.

utopian thought. It is not content to regard the perfect social order as a dream. Beneath the apocalyptic form in which the teachings of Jesus were cast it finds the religious conviction that the kingdom of God will come. It sees the will of God being worked out in history, in a history which itself demonstrates the evolutionary hypothesis. This view of eschatology therefore expresses confidence in social movements as methods of achieving the ideal. The task of the church is to implement the ideals which have come down to us in our religious tradition with techniques selected after an intelligent examination of the situation in our own times.

The legalistic, authoritarian approach to theology involves a reversion to the older type of utopian thought. Since it is based on materials surviving in Christianity from Jewish apocalypticism, it naturally shares the conviction of that movement that nothing can be done, that the ideal state will be achieved only by divine intervention. The centuries have widened the gulf between the actual order and this Hebrew or Jewish picture of the ideal. When the Jews have been wanderers without a country for nineteen centuries, and blood sacrifices have disappeared from the religion of civilized peoples, it is clear that the natural processes of history cannot be expected to produce a situation in which all nations of the earth will come to Jerusalem to worship and to offer sacrifice.

Instead of discarding the form of this picture, this type of eschatology condemns our present order and dreams of the day when the divine program will be consummated. It is of necessity pessimistic toward the possibility of improvement in the present order, and can see no hope for the coming of its utopia except by divine intervention, and intervention by force.

Millennialism is essentially the application of this second, legalistic type of theology to the field of eschatology. Accepting the survivals of Jewish apocalypticism in the Bible as the verbally inspired word of God, the movement is equipped with a rigid and detailed picture of the future of the race. Since the present world order is under the control of the devil, there can be no good in it. The ideal state of the future cannot be expected to find realization through an evolutionary growth from our present achievements. It must be super-imposed on the present order. Recognizing the power of vested interests in our present society, and regarding man, as a race, as incurably selfish, the movement finds no hope in any other technique than force.¹ Christ must return in power, to rule with a rod of iron, to subdue the kingdoms of this world. Until he comes, therefore, the Christian

¹J.M. Gray, Text-book on Prophecy, pp. 56-57, 124, New York: Revell Pub. Co., 1918.

church can do nothing but gather out of the world those individuals who will accept this kind of theology and who will wait in patience for the day of deliverance.¹ It is not a part of the divine program, and it is useless for the church to attempt, by the only possible technique, to super-impose the perfect world order on the present evil one. Any program for the amelioration of social ills might tend to delay the advent, since the present age must end in chaos. One writer compares all such efforts to the shining of the brass work on a sinking ship. The attitude of the millennialists toward such programs of social reform varies from the non-committal position that it lies outside the true field of Christian service,² to the denunciation of such efforts as a part of the wickedness of the secular world, to be opposed by all true Christians.³

The group which keeps millennialism alive in our modern world, therefore, is composed of those whose religious training and experience has been expressed in an authoritarian and legalistic theology, based on a reverence for and an appeal to the letter of the Bible.

¹Christabel Pankhurst, He Cometh, p. 61, New York: The Book Stall, 1923.

²C.I. Scofield, Addresses on Prophecy, p. 26, New York: Our Hope Publishing Office, 1910.

³Mark Matthews, Christian Worker's Magazine, Sept., 1916, p. 17.

(b)

Socio-psychological Factors

This authoritarianism in the theology of the millennialist movement is an indication of the nature of the appeal of the movement. For, as E.A. Ross says, "the domination of a system of belief in the supernatural depends less on its plausibility than on the perfection with which its control meets the needs of the social organism."¹ While millennialism is far from a position of domination in modern theology, its very survival is proof of its ability to meet certain needs and interests which are dominant in the minds of those who accept the doctrine.

The desire for security, as described by W.I. Thomas,² is a dominant note in the thinking of the millennialists. One of them insists that

"an abstract vision is too tantalizing for a groping generation! Unless we can present a message -- a concrete message -- that shall overmaster the distress of the present cataclysm, then we have no message that can adequately quench the thirst of a dying world."³

The modern revival of millennialism appeared first, in this country, in the late nineteenth century, but reached its climax in the second decade of this century. There is abundant illustration of the aptness of the sub-title of a historical study of millennialism published in 1918, "A Phase of War-Time Thinking."⁴ Much of the appeal of the modern movement lies in its offer of a comprehensive, authoritative and dramatic interpretation of the times, which gives to the believer a sense of security in a situation of change.

The events of the war were interpreted by the millennialists as fulfillments of Biblical prophecies and therefore evidences of the correctness of their position. These were the perilous times which were to mark the end of the age. The capture of Jerusalem and the reorganization of the map of Europe offered new possibilities for the restoration of Palestine to the Jews and the reappearance of the Roman Empire, political conditions which must characterize the last days.⁵ The communist and fascist dictators

¹E.A. Ross, Social Control, p. 136, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1906.

²W.I. Thomas, The Unadjusted Girl, p. 12, Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1923.

³H.P. King, The Imperial Hope, p. 77, New York: Revell, 1918.

⁴S.J. Case, The Millennial Hope, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1918.

⁵vide, e.g., H.J.G. Howe, The Dawning of That Day, pp. 44 seq., London: Advent Testimony and Preparation Movement, 1922.

who gained power in the post-war years were types of the Anti-christ.¹ No important aspect of the political or economic condition of the times escaped the millennialists. They offered a unified picture, an interpretation of the times that fit the situation, as F.B. Meyer said, as a key fits a lock.²

The authoritarian basis of this interpretation gave the believer the conviction that he was on the side of inevitable victory. These signs of the times were divine warnings, and he understood them. Communism, according to one of its exponents, offers a similar unified picture of the times:

"The Marxian philosophy has this immense advantage over its orthodox rivals: it enables the social process, and the universe at large, to be comprehended as a whole, and the bourgeois system to be seen as a necessarily temporary phase in this eternal flux. Its disciples are thus able to face discouragement and defeat and to derive renewed enthusiasm from opposition and hostility.³

The war years and the post-war years also marked a waning of the social optimism which characterized the first decade of this century. Changes in governmental forms, the instability of the new European democracies, the appearance of communist and fascist forms of government, and, more recently, the economic depression have resulted in a greater sense of uncertainty and instability than in the previous decade. While every moment is a moment of crisis for the millennialist, the references in the literature of the movement to the uncertainty of the times are not unrelated to the actual situation, but are only exaggerations of that situation created by the minds of those who were looking for disintegration.

In this situation the utopianism of the millennialist movement, its offer of an imminent end for all our troubles, a perfect solution of our political and economic problems, the end of uncertainty and the dawn of a perfect society, were appeals of real strength. Harold Laski describes the similar appeal of communism in those years:

"The liberation of the human spirit has not nearly kept pace with the conquest of nature by scientific discovery. The gain

¹L. Sale-Harrison, The League of Nations, p. 4, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Evangelical Press, 1930.

²W.P. Hicks, The Second Coming in Relation to the Present World Crisis, foreward (by F.B. Meyer), London: Advent Testimony and Preparation Movement, 1926.

³William Paul, Communism and Society, p. 74, London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1922.

of living is denied to the majority of those who toil. And the more widely the realisation of these disparities is spread, the more intensely do men feel that they are intolerable. That is the more natural in the disillusion that follows upon a great war. Men feel that if they are to risk their lives for the State, its benefits should be proportionate to the danger. It is in that mood of doubt that the masses meet the idealism of the communist faith. They hear an indictment of the conditions under which they live, which largely corresponds to their own experience. They are warned that they cannot trust to their rulers for the changes which will meet their needs. They are promised, in return for their energetic solidarity, an equal share in the gain of living as well as in its toil, a world in which there is principle instead of chaos, justice instead of privilege. To men whose environment is poisoned by insecurity and for whom, in general, there is little hope of future benefit, the only wonder is that the promise has not proved more seductive."¹

John Dewey, in an article written just after the Armistice, says that it is in such periods that millennial expectations are born, and describes the millennium as "the compensatory refuge of immediate distress and imminent evil."² The millennialist movement made good use of this opportunity. It offered the same stability as communism to the uncertain. J.R. Kaye wrote:

"With all the disintegration that is going on about us, the crime, the wickedness and increasing indifference of the world, unsettledness on every hand, the child of God, rooted and grounded in the 'sure word of prophecy' is radiant with the hope of the coming Christ, and can fervently pray, 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus.'"³

Millennialism differs from communism in two fundamental aspects. It offers neither a complete picture of the ideal society, nor a program for achieving the millennium in which the believer can join. Millennialism claims authority only for that which it finds in the Bible, and the Biblical pictures of the millennium are not developed in any detail. Millennialism therefore only rarely discusses the administration of government, business, or family life in the millennium. These things will take care of themselves when Christ returns.

¹Harold J. Laski, Communism, pp. 239-240, New York: Henry Holt, 1927.

²"The Post-War Mind," New Republic, p. 157, Dec. 7, 1918.

³J.R. Kaye, The Coming Crisis, p. 89, Chicago: Buxton-Westerman Co., 1927.

The social conservatism which is expressed in millennialist literature in frequent denunciations of democracy as well as socialism and communism¹ is a further expression of the demand for security to which the movement appeals. Everything will be settled in the new world order. But these men are far from worshippers of the present order. Their quarrel with these liberal and radical movements is the quarrel of competitors. Their picture of the future is the correct one.

It is, therefore, nearer the truth to say that millennialism, already possessing some influence in Protestant orthodoxy in 1914, made good use of the political events of the war and the subsequent unrest and uncertainty, rather than to attribute the modern survival of millennialism to the social situation of the last two decades. This situation made it possible for millennialism to enjoy a larger influence than in more stable and settled times. But its appeal was still limited to those for whom the literal approach to the Bible could furnish an authoritative interpretation of the times and a picture of the golden age to come.

Compensatory mechanisms also underlie this belief in the imminent return of Christ. Millennialism offers the joys of an ideal world to those who for any reason are unhappy and dissatisfied in the present world order. It assures its converts that they are among the number of the elect, the saints of God. One writer expresses his elation at this prospect of future bliss as follows: "When all the saints come, this one is coming! 'I am included.'"²

Certain millennialist writers make much of Biblical references to rewards and crowns to be awarded in connection with the advent, and offers the hope of these rewards as the proper motivation for a holy life, a life of separation from the world.³ There is even a special crown reserved for those who "love his appearing":

"There is also the crown of righteousness. (2 Timothy 4:7,8). This comes for watchfulness, so you see that our love of pre-millennial truth is worth while after all. There is a crown for loving His appearing. Can a man receive it if he is not among the watchers?"⁴

¹Vide, e.g., F.C. Ottman, Imperialism and Christ, *passim*, New York: C.C. Cook, 1912, J. Stuart Holden, Will the Christ Return?, pp. 41-42, New York: Revell, 1918.

²W.L. Pettingill, Light on Prophecy, p. 261, New York: The Christian Herald, 1918.

³Bob Jones, Coming and Kingdom of Christ, p. 139, by J.M. Gray and others, Chicago: Bible Institute Colportage Assn., 1916.

⁴W.L. Pettingill, ibid., p. 241.

The counsels of the movement to patience with the evils of this present order are also enforced by the assurance of compensation in the day of the advent. W.H. Griffith Thomas writes:

"Those who are today often persecuted and ostracised and boycotted and despised are going to stand out in that day, because they have been faithful to God and His Word; they are going to be honored and glorified in the presence of our Lord. And so we are to live day by day in the light of that coming, and feel sure that vindication will be ours."¹

Millennialism functions as a compensatory mechanism for those who are conscious of their own maladjustment or inferiority in some social relationship, or for those who realize that they are regarded as inferior by their fellows. The most frequent overt expressions of this mechanism in the literature of the movement relate to the question of intellectual inferiority. Although the movement makes much of the names of scholars and religious leaders, most of them of earlier times, whom it claims as colleagues, it also reminds us that "the revealed things of God" are hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes.² The millennialist has the essential knowledge, the "prophetic" understanding of the Bible and this is all that is necessary for those who expect the imminent destruction of the present order.

There is a wide range in the influence of the millennialists in the churches and denominations to which they belong. Many of them receive considerable ecclesiastical recognition as ministers of local churches and leaders in conservative groups in the various denominations. But the recurrence in the literature of the idea that "the saints," among whom the millennialists are numbered, are to reign with Christ in the millennium, indicates that some find in this hope a compensation for a present lack of recognition.

This same hope of a future glory in the administration of the millennium also furnishes compensation for a present position of social or economic inferiority. It is somewhat difficult to determine the economic and social status of the constituency of the movement. The speakers at the prophetic conferences and the authors of the millennialist literature are, with few exceptions, ministers and evangelists. It is natural that the spokesmen of a movement which depends so largely on the interpretation of the Bible should be those who are, presumably, best acquainted with the Bible. The subscription list of millennialist periodicals

¹In Christ and Glory, by A.C. Gaebelain, p. 196, New York: Our Hope Publishing Office, 1918.

²W. Fuller Gooch, in Advent Testimony Addresses, p. 23, by F.B. Meyer and others, London: C.J. Thynne, 1918.

would furnish an index to the constituency. But it has proved impossible to secure such lists, and it is doubtful whether those who thus express interest in millennialism would co-operate in such a study as this by furnishing information about themselves.

Certain churches have been, for a number of years, under the leadership of ministers who are also leaders in this movement. An examination of the constituency of these churches has shed little light on the problem. So far as we have been able to determine, the membership of these churches constitutes a fair cross-section of the communities in which they are located. College professors and college graduates, as well as those who have had only a common-school education, business and industrial leaders as well as mechanics, tradesmen and clerks, are represented in these churches. One must recognize that many other factors than the acceptance of the millennialist position held by the minister enter into the determination of the membership of a local church. We are therefore limited, for the most part, to certain generalizations concerning the constituency of the movement which are clearly implied in its literature.

One would expect that the proponents of such a movement would be those who have comparatively little stake in this present order. It is difficult to see how persons of wealth and social position could achieve a sufficient detachment from the things of this world to be impressed by millennialism.¹ Yet some persons of wealth have accepted this doctrine and assisted in financing its propagation. It is equally difficult to see how those who suffer most keenly from the injustices of the present social order could long endure the counsel of patience which is the movement's only answer to this problem. Such persons would, it would seem, be more interested in such a movement as communism, which gives them work to do in a program for achieving the millennium.

Yet the movement has found a small following in this group as well. And here the promise of future bliss would seem to be of paramount importance in the appeal of the movement. Norman B. Harrison, speaking of present-day industrial unrest, assured working men that there was "no need of Christ's own being led into socialistic agitation over present evils, when they await the sure solution in His promised return."²

¹W.E. Blackstone writes, "Those who are enjoying the well-watered plains of this world seem to care very little about seeing the Owner of the Estate," in Jesus is Coming, p. 215, Chicago: Revell, (presentation edition) 1908.

²Norman B. Harrison, His Sure Return, p. 49, Chicago: Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1926.

The functioning of millennialism as a way of escape from evil or distress has doubtless widened the appeal of the movement in recent years, but it is a factor of questionable importance in the continuing survival of the movement. It practically never appears in the writings of the leading exponents of the doctrine. One writer has expressed the conviction of a large group in the movement that "anticipation of the second coming of the Lord is not indulgence in a mere spiritual luxury, nor does expectation of His return tend to make Christians impractical."¹ It remains true that insofar as men can be consistent millennialists, they are escaping from this world and its responsibilities to another world where everything is taken care of for them. But it is necessary to remark as well that any eschatology based on a literal interpretation of the Bible, would be, of necessity, a way of escape rather than a program of action.

This compensatory mechanism is ordinarily defended by an appeal to the authority of the Bible. For the millennialist shares with the prophet in all ages the conviction that his message is not his own. He is speaking the will of God, and interpreting the word of God.² This, he would say, is his only motive and his certain duty. This sense of mission is usually expressed in absolutist and even in pugnacious terms. Oswald J. Smith writes: "I don't care whether you believe it or not. I don't care whether you like it or not. I don't care whether you want it to end this way or not. That is the way God says it will be."³

It is, of course, impossible to be a consistent millennialist. Since the Lord may come at any moment, those who are looking for his advent are advised to separate themselves from the world and its evils, to keep themselves holy. J.M. Gray, a leader of the movement admits that "we cannot absolutely separate ourselves from its society, its literature, its politics, its commerce, but we can separate ourselves from its methods, its spirit and its aims."⁴ If this attempted distinction between contemporary society and its *Zeitgeist* were valid, it would make possible a relatively consistent attitude on the part of the millennialist. Dr. Gray is admitting that he finds it impossible to separate himself

¹C.F. Hogg and W.E. Vine, Touching the Coming of the Lord, p. 127, London: Oliphants, Ltd., 1919.

²Cf. S.C. Kincheloe, The Prophet -- A Study of the Sociology of Leadership, p. 232, Ph. D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1929.

³O.J. Smith, Antichrist and the Future, p. 13, Toronto: Tabernacle Publishers, 1932.

⁴J.M. Gray, Prophecy and the Lord's Return, p. 109, New York: Revell, 1917.

from the modern world, in accordance with his millennialist viewpoint, and still act as president of Moody Bible Institute, securing endowment funds for an indefinite future and offering professional training for the leadership of religious organizations. And he thus rationalizes the conflict. We are evidently dealing with a type of theology which necessitates compartmentalized thinking in the modern world. And we may expect that the relative importance of concern for the imminent return of Christ will vary with different men and, in different times, with the same men.

The modern millennialist movement has flourished in this country without forming any separate organization. Local groups of ministers and laymen holding this position have formed societies, in a few cases, but these have exercised comparatively little influence.

A number of the leaders in the movement are ministers. But the constant criticism of the "professing church" for its apostasy, which is an outstanding characteristic of the modern movement,¹ sets a limit to the influence of millennialism in the pulpits of American or British Protestantism. As a non-denominational movement of an ultra-conservative type, millennialism has gained a proportionately stronger following among professional evangelists.² Unable to use the organization and influence of the organized church as a medium for its propaganda, the modern movement has been forced to find other, less formal media.

Such group feeling as there is among the millennialists is largely the result of a series of "prophetic conferences" which were held on both sides of the Atlantic. The most important of these were the New York conference in 1878, the Chicago conferences in 1886 and 1914, the London conference in 1917, and the Philadelphia conference in 1918.³ The conferences were devoted exclusively to the presentation of various aspects of the advent, and the theological beliefs and programs of action associated with it.

¹A.C. Gaebelein, The Return of the Lord, pp. 101-102, New York: Our Hope Publishing Office, 1925.

²For lists of ministers, teachers, missionaries and evangelists claimed by the movement, see T.C. Horton, These Premillennialists; Who are They?, Los Angeles: publisher unknown, 1921.

³Reports of these conferences are published under the titles, Premillennial Essays, Chicago: Revell, 1878; Prophetic Studies, Chicago: Revell, 1886; The Coming and Kingdom of Christ, Chicago: Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1914; Advent Testimony Addresses, London: Chas. J. Thynne, 1918; and Light on Prophecy, New York: The Christian Herald, 1918.

Of equal importance in the influence of the movement has been the wide-spread distribution of books and pamphlets expounding the millennial hope.¹ The movement has been strengthened by the influence of such schools as the Moody Bible Institute, in Chicago, where the doctrine is taught, and where periodicals are published which further disseminate these ideas. An independent periodical, Our Hope, edited by A.C. Gaebelein, is devoted exclusively to the cause, as is The Advent Witness, the organ of the British movement.

In all of these means of dissemination of the doctrine the techniques of the movement can be properly called propaganda. Raymond Dodge describes the principal differentiating characteristic of all types of propaganda as "their emphasis on the feelings and their appeal to emotional logic."² Since all matters of belief are settled in advance by reference to an infallible authority, millennialism is forced to substitute persuasion and an appeal to the emotions for argument of proof.

Dodge describes the basic mechanism of propaganda as follows:

"All propaganda is capitalized prejudice. It rests on some emotional premise which is the motive force of the process.

The emotional transfer is worked by some associative process like similarity, use, or the causal relationship."³

The function of the "signs of the times" in this connection is obvious. These aspects of current history are described by the millennialist as fulfilments of prophecy, and, therefore, identical with the picture of the end of the age described in the Bible. This is clearly an emotional appeal to the loyalty of his hearers to the Bible.

Walter Lippmann reminds us that "the more untrained a mind, the more readily it works out a theory that two things which catch its attention at the same time are causally connected."⁴ The protagonist of millennialism makes this transfer quite easily. Not only does our present situation resemble the pictured "time of the end," but it is that time. God gave us the picture, and He is now bringing it to actuality. The influence of this emotional appeal

¹W.E. Blackstone, Jesus is Coming, Chicago: Revell, 1908. Due to the wide circulation and the many editions of this book it could be properly called the text-book of the movement.

²Raymond Dodge, "The Psychology of Propaganda," Religious Education, October, 1920 vol. XV, p. 242.

³Raymond Dodge, ibid., p. 244.

⁴Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion, p. 154, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922.

is strengthened by the personal reference with which so many sermons and books close. A.C. Gaebelien, after describing the present fulfilment of the signs of the end, says, "My reader, are you ready to meet Him?"¹

Slogans are defined by F.E. Lumley as "any brief, popularly received and reiterated challenge to immediate participation in competitive or conflicting social interactions."² The propaganda of the millennialist movement has made free use of slogans, most of them selected phrases or verses from the Bible. "The Lord is at hand!" "He is coming soon!" "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" These phrases may not convince, but they do convert.

To this use of slogans is to be attributed much of the unity of the movement. There is no unanimity of opinion concerning the details in the picture of the future. There is no consensus of opinion concerning the details of the attitudes proper for those who hold this hope. But the movement can agree on phrases. And the manifestoes of faith published by the various prophetic conferences well illustrate the contribution to unity which these slogans have made.

In an appeal to individual or group loyalties and emotions, originality is not so desirable as repetition. It is not surprising, therefore, to find authors of books and pamphlets in this field disclaiming any original contribution for their literary productions, and following other writers both in the classification of their materials and in the materials themselves. The typical book expounding the doctrine includes a statement of the importance of the subject in Scripture, and the consequent necessity of our interesting ourselves in it, a discussion of the signs of the times, a description of the future events, and an emphasis on the futility of all movements working for the improvement of the present world order.

The propaganda of the modern movement makes very little use of threats. Hell and the devil are real, to be sure, and the "great tribulation" which is to occur on the earth between the first and second phases of the advent will be a time of terror and suffering. But this fear of evil and pain to come, while it strengthens the appeal of the escape mechanism offered by the movement, is not emphasized in the propaganda. The majority of the speakers and writers make greater use of the depiction of the glories of the "rapture," and joys of eternal fellowship with

¹A.C. Gaebelien, Meat in Due Season, p. 65, New York: Our Hope Publishing Office, 1932.

²F.E. Lumley, Means of Social Control, p. 161, New York: The Century Company, 1925.

Christ, than of warnings and threats of the evil results of indifference to their appeal.

S.C. Kincheloe has pointed out the tendency of the prophet to condemn the present while he offers, at the same time, a way of escape. In this connection, he writes, "It might be said that certain prophets have tended to exaggerate the picture of calamity."¹ As we have said, this is a characteristic feature of the millennialist prophet.² The sense of crisis would seem to be essential to the appeal of the movement. "Post-millennialism" has little meaning simply because it postpones these dramatic events until the closing days of a millennium of peace and happiness which the church is to establish. The millennialist movement insists not only that Christ may come at any moment, but that he will come soon. It makes this prophecy seem plausible by an interpretation of the events and the condition of the times in terms of crisis.

The nature of the subject matter with which the movement deals makes it possible to present the cause in vivid and dramatic form. The whole schema of the future events is a great cosmic drama, a divine comedy. The signs of the times have real dramatic values. The last days are to be perilous days. Some of the millennialists make much of the climacteric signs -- earthquakes and cyclones and storms at sea. It is not difficult to imagine the vivid manner in which the battle of Armageddon could be described. This field has great possibilities as sermon material!

Underlying this dramatic presentation is the materialistic nature of the millennial hope which makes the drama possible. The movement offers a very real cataclysm to introduce the millennium, and a physically present Christ. This, like all formalism, as Cooley puts it, is "psychically cheap."³ It requires less thought than a less tangible interpretation of the future. But to say this is only to say that the road of the religion of the spirit is relatively steep, and that there are still those who choose the lower road.

¹S.C. Kincheloe, op. cit., p. 149.

²Supra, pp. 72-73.

³C.H. Cooley, Social Organization, p. 343, New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1909.

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Religious Values conserved in Millennialism

In such a rich tradition of experience as is represented in the Christian religion, there is room for great diversity of emphasis. Many separatist and sectarian groups in Christianity represent an emphasis, (and often an over-emphasis), on some temporarily neglected aspect of Christian belief and practice. It would appear, for example, that a part of the appeal of the Christian Science movement is due to the failure of most modern churches to concern themselves with the implications of the gospel for mental health.

Modern millennialism also represents an emphasis on certain phases of Christian belief which are receiving comparatively little attention. First of all, millennialism re-states the ancient conviction of the Hebrew prophets and of Jesus, that, since God is revealed in the historical process, the end of that process cannot be frustration. Millennialists look forward to a state of perfection for society as well as for the individual. W.O.E. Oesterley finds in this emphasis the chief significance of belief in the second advent.¹

The end of the historical process in terms of the kingdom of God, as explained by most modern Christian churches, does continue this emphasis. But there is a constant danger that the necessity of concentrating our attention on our present duties in advancing the kingdom in our own day, by devoting our energies to the solution of our present social problems, will weaken if not destroy the values of the longer view. The church should voice again its conviction that "these things shall be!" Wilfred Monod has well stated this conviction:

"Si la doctrine du Millennium répond à un postulat philosophique, elle s'appuie surtout sur une nécessité morale. La foi chrétienne refusera toujours d'admettre que l'Eglise de Jésus-Christ finira par la banqueroute, après avoir commencé par la Pentecôte. L'heure sonnera où tous les germes qu'elle porte en elle s'épanouiront, où l'Eglise manifestera ses vertus salutaires dans la domaine religieux; où le monde enfin, selon une belle parole de Rothe, verra que le Christ n'est pas seulement un ecclésiastique ou un prêtre, mais un Souverain Sacrificateur et un Roi."²

¹W.O.E. Oesterley, Doctrine of the Last Things, pp. 219-220, London: John Murray, 1909.

²Wilfred Monod, L'Espérance chrétienne, Vol. I, p. 393, Vals-les-Bains, Aberlen et Cie., 1899, 2 vol.

Closely related to this emphasis is the stress laid on the importance of the present moment. The present moment may be the last. Christ may come at any time, and he is sure to come soon. As we have said, this conviction is an important part of the message of modern millennialism. All the necessary signs have now been fulfilled, and there is no necessary intervening event before the advent. An important slogan in the propaganda is, "Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."¹

This sense of crisis does function in the life of the millennialist as an incentive to a high standard of personal conduct. When Christ comes, he wants to be discovered to be engaged in activities which Christ will approve. The sense of detachment from the world engendered by his faith allows the millennialist to devote his attention to the development of his private religious life. The literature is replete with testimonies to the practicability of the doctrine. W.B. Riley insists that the advocates of millennialism have never been surpassed "in the realm of social service -- such as giving to the poor, providing for the hungry, clothing the cold..... showing brotherhood to the imprisoned and love for the social outcast."² J.M. Gray describes the millennialists in a certain church as follows:

"The members of my church on whose hearts the coming of Christ had made any sensible impression were separated from that whole system of worldliness of which theatre-going is only a single symptom. They were the working force of my church along spiritual lines, and the most intelligent Bible students. They manifested the greatest power in prayer. They were the most self-denying givers. They lived the most even and consistent lives."³

There is some difference of opinion concerning the value of this sense of crisis. The present Barthian movement in German theology is re-emphasizing the importance of the decision, of the choice between alternatives which constantly present themselves. There are many who insist that this sense of crisis is an essential part of the gospel.⁴

¹I.M. Haldeman, Why I Preach the Second Coming, p. 145, New York: Revell, 1919.

²W.L. Pettingill, Light on Prophecy, p. 306, New York: The Christian Herald, 1918.

³J.M. Gray, Prophecy and the Lord's Return, New York: Revell, 1917, p. 36.

⁴Vide, e.g., C.F. Andrews, What I Owe to Christ, p. 191, New York: Abingdon Press, 1932.

Those whose minds are accustomed to deal with historical and sociological materials may easily lose this sense of the importance of the moment. But it would seem that a balance must be struck. It is equally foolish to take the short view of millennialism, in which the length of time remaining in this present age is compared to the thickness of an eyelash.¹

It is difficult to point out the religious values which are conserved in millennialism without calling attention, at the same time, to their over-emphasis at the hands of the movement. The conviction that only the return of the same Jesus who walked the earth can make this world a fit place in which to live does express the conviction of all ages of Christian experience that Jesus stands pre-eminent as the revealer of the divine will and character. But when the millennialists find references to his second advent in the Old Testament, and when they depict the coming of Christ to rule the nations by force, one wonders not only what they have done with the human Jesus, but also what they have done with God. Jesus is so central in their thinking that the millennialists seem to lose the vision of the Father that Jesus taught.

Similarly, the conviction of the movement that individuals can and must be saved out of an evil society rings true to Christian conviction. Particularly in Protestantism, the Christian religion has insisted that men are saved as individuals, that, as Royce so well puts it, "this mortal must put on individuality." But it forgets that other truth of the French proverb, that "one is always somebody's child." The individualism of millennialism expresses itself in praiseworthy attempts to rescue the derelicts of human society, but it makes it impossible for the movement to attack the social forces which produce them.

¹I.M. Haldeman, Why I Preach the Second Coming, p. 144, New York: Revell, 1919.

